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Program on Information Resources Policy

Anthony G. Oettinger
John C. LeGates
John F. McLaughlin
Benjamin M. Compaine
Oswald H. Ganley

Executive Registry

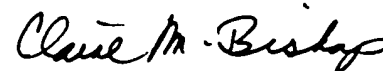
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June 21, 1985

Enclosed with this mailing are four items regarding the Program in general: a recent article in the Harvard Gazette, a recent Newsletter, our current list of publications, and the list of projects underway.

If you would like to know more about any of these, give us a call.

Sincerely,



Claire M. Bishop
Administrator

CMB:mlw

DCI
EXEC
REG

P-304



Harvard University



Center for Information Policy Research

Harvard University
200 Aiken
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138
617-495-4114
Cambridge

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PIRP: Objective Information about Information

In a knowledge-based society, the adage goes, information is power. And discussing power means discussing politics.

So when researchers at Harvard's Program on Information Resources Policy (PIRP) explore the implications of public-policy and corporate-strategy decisions for the use of emerging information systems—such as satellite transmission, fiber optics, computer-linked "smart" credit cards, or a postmonopoly telephone structure—they frankly acknowledge that their work assumes a political character.

Like public-policy analysts in other fast-evolving fields, information-policy researchers must try to hit a moving target. In the sphere of information policy, where technologies can be on the cutting edge of innovation on Monday and obsolete by Friday, maintaining access to up-to-date information is vital.

While pitched battles are being fought before Congress, the courts, and regulatory agencies about the emerging information-based economic order, scholars seeking reliable data must depend on the same corporations, government agencies, and research laboratories, which have institutional interests—and sometimes millions, or billions, of dollars—at stake.

Inevitably, information-policy researchers must get involved in, broadly speaking, "political" exchanges of sensitive data. But how to do so without compromising scholarly integrity?

PIRP, designed to serve as a center for developing and exploring options in information and communications policy, has "devised a new way of doing research," says John C. LeGates, Managing Director of PIRP and one of the program's five principal researchers. In the interest of full disclosure and the broadest exchange of information, PIRP has designed a firm set of rules intended

to prevent both undue influence over its scholarly work and (just as important politically) the appearance of undue influence.

PIRP's conflict-of-interest rules, according to LeGates, are closely observed.

"Our staff does no outside consulting. We do not accept assignments [even from internal PIRP affiliates]. We don't work on other people's deadlines. And we won't appear on a platform" to legitimize the policies or products of any agency, company, or pressure-group, LeGates says. By insulating itself from the slightest suggestion of bias, he says, PIRP maintains its "key credential, the diversity of that base of supporters."

Insulated from pressure and trusted by all the parties in the current information-technology battles, PIRP has been able to tackle controversial issues while maintaining its scholarly integrity. As a result, the research reports and policy analyses generated by Harvard's program, which was founded in 1972, have helped PIRP become one of the academic world's leading research organizations on information policy.

"The world is shaped not by what is technologically possible, but also by what is politically possible," says LeGates. "We do play a role that is political, beyond our scholarly function. But we're very self-conscious and explicit that we're not in the power business. We're in the information business."

PIRP's roster of more than 100 affiliates includes federal communications planners, national-security agencies, international communications-policy bodies, and many of the world's largest communications companies.

Information-users with an interest in the end result of the communications process—including banks, industrial

manufacturers, newspaper companies, research firms, and labor unions—are also among PIRP affiliates. Congressional committees and their staffs have repeatedly drawn on PIRP researchers' expertise when examining options in information policy.

PIRP's policy handbook advises that "our project leaders are expected to steer clear not only of partisan advocacy, but also of least-common-denominator consensus."

Identifying the "stakeholders" within its own structure, accepting no classified or proprietary work, and making all its work available to the public, PIRP fills a niche in the policy-making process that no other academic policy group, partisan "think tank," or corporate research institute fills, PIRP's principals believe.

With five principals, eight research fellows, and a small group of graduate-student researchers and supporting staff, PIRP maintains "an ongoing production line of research reports," LeGates says. Reports written by PIRP staff members are distributed among the programs' affiliates for review, comment, and adjustment. At times, reports are also sent out for expert review by authorities in such disciplines as law or economics.

Often, LeGates says, the process of consultation on research reports among PIRP affiliates becomes an arena, before the regulatory or congressional stage, for negotiation. Competitors on a corporate or public-policy issue may begin to resolve their substantive differences in the course of hammering out compromise language for a PIRP report.

The program divides its work into five broad areas: "communications" (a PIRP coinage that signifies the merger of computer and telecommunications technologies); postal and allied arenas; the national-security area of "intelligence, com-